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Attendees: See Attached List

Date/Time: 3/13/00 7:00pm

Project No.: 50885

Place: Windham Town Hall

Re: Windham Public Officials I-93 Salem to  
Manchester

Notes taken by: Bruce Tasker

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**Jeff Brillhart explained the Background and Purpose of the Project**

This project involves at constructing improvements along I-93 between state line Salem and the I-93 I-293 split in Manchester, a distance of approximately 18 miles or so.

The Department is proposing to widen the north and southbound barrels from the existing two lanes in each direction to three or four lanes in each direction. In addition, the five interchanges along this section of I-93 would be reconstructed or otherwise improved.

The project is a part of the State's Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Program. It was included in the original Ten-Year Plan adopted back in 1986.

The Department first began looking at what might be needed along the corridor in 1988 and 89. As the Department proceeded, the Environmental Resource Agencies indicated that a much more in-depth environmental study would be necessary to consider all alternatives and justify the proposed widening. In 1991, the Department agreed to conduct the highest level of study, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The EIS was underway in 1992, and at that point questions were raised as to the Department's methodology for projecting future traffic volumes on I-93 and how improvements to I-93 interfaced with the rest of the transportation network in NH. The outcome of the discussion was to have a consultant create a Statewide Transportation Corridor Model.

By 1998, the model was nearing completion, the Department hired VHB to do the engineering and provide overall coordination for the EIS.

Over the last 2 years, base mapping has been updated; existing environmental (natural, cultural, socio-economic) resources have been cataloged, mapped, and evaluated; the model has been calibrated and traffic data has been developed; and the overall background information put together so that alternatives can be considered in a reasonable way.

The purpose of the project is to improve transportation efficiency and reduce safety problems associated with this 18-mile segment of I-93. Options include reactivating rail service; improving

bus service and other Transportation Demand Management Strategies (like Park & Ride accommodations, Intelligent Transportation Systems technology), widening the highway and improving the interchanges.

I-93 is a major interstate highway, and perhaps the major transportation link in NH. It is vital to NH's social and economic well being and it is in need of being improved.

The highway has a theoretical capacity to carry in the vicinity of 60,000 to 70,000 vpd. In the Salem area, the highway currently carries over 100,000 vpd. By 2020, the projected volumes are approximately 140,000 vpd. The projected volumes are on the conservative side; that is they are low in comparison to earlier projections.

Regardless, the highway is beyond being over capacity. The amount of traffic results in the highway being less forgiving and consequently less safe. The demand on the corridor requires consideration of significant improvements. This study is intended to provide a thorough review of the issues, options, and ramifications, so that the State can move forward with constructing the necessary improvements.

### **Tony Grande discussed the Regional Map and 400 scale base plans and project issues**

#### **Regional Location Map**

- The map shows surrounding towns and major roadways east and west of I-93.
- The segment under study begins at the NH/MA state line and proceeds approximately 18 miles to the I-293/I-93 split.
- Also shown on the map are 3 existing and one potential rail corridor:
  - the West corridor is the existing rail line from Lowell, MA, north through Nashua, Merrimack, Bedford and up to Manchester,
  - the East corridor is the abandoned M&L rail line and it extends from Lawrence, MA, north through Salem, Windham, Derry, Londonderry and up to Manchester;
  - the Portland to Boston rail corridor through Dover, Exeter, Plaistow to Lawrence MA. This existing rail corridor currently under reconstruction and service is expected to begin in Jan. 2001;
  - an I-93 median rail corridor alternative is proposed.

#### **400 Scale Map**

The 400 scale base map and color coding shows the existing conditions (existing pavement, existing buildings, right of way, etc) and resources (wetlands, open water, potential historic districts and structures, etc). The map begins at the MA/NH state line and proceeds northerly for approx. 18 miles through the Towns of Salem, Windham, Derry, Londonderry and Manchester, ending at the I-93/I-293 split.

#### **Existing Conditions / Problem areas**

- Highway was built in the 1960's and consequently has substandard geometrics and components in areas.(cable guard rail; 4' inside shoulder )
- Back ups currently occur along the mainline traveling SB in the morning and NB in the evening particularly in the southern half of the corridor.
- Back ups also occur at several interchange locations where the interchange is unable to process the volumes of traffic and traffic backs up onto the highway. Of particular concern is the Exit 3 NB off ramp and the Exit 5 SB off ramp.
- The congestion is the result of the highway at, or exceeding capacity.
- Weaving/merging traffic at Exit 2 SB is a problem.

- Acceleration and deceleration areas are inadequate in length for on and off ramps; a longer transition would allow drivers more time and give a better comfort level getting on and off the highway.

#### Recent Roadway and Bridge Work Completed in the I-93 Corridor

- Exit 1 NB lane addition as part of the Rockingham Mall development (1990) added capacity.
- Salem rest area reconstruction (1993) improved facility capacity and access.
- Exit 4 interchange reconstruction (1990) added capacity.
- Weigh stations in Windham currently under construction to improve truck safety.
- Windham Bridge over 111A (replaced 1994)
- Windham – Bridges over North Lowell Road (replaced 1994/96)
- Derry – Bridges over Fordway Extension (widened & rehab – 1996)
- Derry – Bridges over Kendall Pond Road (widened & rehab – 1996)
- Londonderry – Bridges over Stonehenge Road (replaced 1994/95)
- Manchester – Bridges over Cohas Brook and Bodwell Road (widened & rehab – construction underway)

Three types of environmental resources to be evaluated include natural, cultural, socio-economic resources. Secondary impacts (those which occur as an indirect result of constructing an improved highway system) are also of concern and will be evaluated.

Some of the potential resource concerns that have been identified to date, include:

- Property impacts (and noise impacts) where buildings/neighborhoods/commercial developments are close to I-93 or interchange areas.
- Porcupine Brook/Prime Wetlands - Salem
- Potential flood issues - Salem
- Canobie Lake – Drinking water supply - Windham
- Cobbetts Pond residential and recreational area -Windham
- Archaeological (median) & Historic Resources (Searles Castle-Windham)
- Prime Wetlands – Derry
- Cohas Brook – Manchester

#### The range of alternatives to be evaluated for this project:

- No Build – used as baseline for comparison.
- TSM Improvements; projects that can enhance safety and provide some congestion relief, generally within the ROW (adding or extending turn lanes, providing or improving traffic signals, employing Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) technology).
- Widen I-93 to 6 or 8 lanes.
- Widen I-93 to 8 lanes w/HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle), lanes for vehicles w/2 or more passengers.
- TDM Strategies- opportunities which reduce demand on the highway system (i.e. park & ride lots, ridesharing, transit bus and train- including consideration of an I-93 median rail corridor for a passenger only rail service with possible stations located at Exits 2,3,4,5).

#### Jeff Brillhart Reviewed the Project Process and Schedule

There are three stages a project goes through once it is on the State's Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Program. These are:

1. Preliminary Design and Environmental Documentation and approval of a layout.
2. Final Design and Purchase of Right-of-Way.
3. Construction.

The project is currently in the first Stage – Preliminary Design and Environmental Documentation.

Within the Preliminary Design and Environmental Documentation stage, there are typically five phases:

1. Scoping Phase – data collection and issues identification.
2. Alternatives Phase – develop and screen conceptual alternatives.
3. Detail Alternatives Phase – develop detailed alternatives.
4. Environmental Documentation and Public Hearing Phase – develop draft environmental documentation and hold Public Hearing.
5. Finalize Environmental Document and Obtain Approvals Phase.

The Department is just completing the Scoping Phase (data collection and issues identification) and is proceeding forward with the Alternatives Phase (developing conceptual alternatives).

The completion of the Scoping Phase will be signified by the publication of the Scoping Report, due out in May.

The completion of the Alternatives Phase will be signified by the publication of the Rationale Report, due out January 2001.

Completion of the Draft EIS and the holding of the Public Hearing are scheduled for January 2002, and approvals are scheduled for January 2003. Construction will begin in early 2004.

An ATF committee has been established to review issues and information periodically through the study process. Each Community has appointed two members and the two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) have appointed one member each. The first meeting is March 22<sup>nd</sup> in Manchester. Subsequent meetings will occur about every 6 weeks, in the various towns along the route.

The next series of Public Official meetings are anticipated to be held in August/September of this year at which conceptual designs will be available.

**Jeff opened the meeting up to questions:**

Comment. Rail line in the median as discussed in the presentation will cross through the historic district and important farmlands along NH 111A, this is a sensitive and important area to the Town.

Jeff. The project will follow a process to determine the nature and significance of the impacts on all resources, whether it is historical, wetlands, etc. Each of the resources will be evaluated and the ramifications of a potential impact considered. The intent is avoid impacts if possible, and impacts that cannot be avoided will be minimized to the extent practicable.

- Comment. There is a heron rookery on the west side of I-93 just south of the weigh station. Will the rookery be impacted?
- Jeff. The layout for the widening has not been developed. However, the median in this area is wide and it would appear that the widening would take place toward the median and not impact the rookery.
- Comment. Massachusetts has provided relief to the congestion by converting its shoulders to travel lanes. Can NH do the same while we wait for construction to solve the problem?
- Jeff. Shoulder lanes are currently being used along I-93 in Massachusetts. The Department is looking into a number of interim solutions to help relieve congestion, and the use of shoulders as temporary travel lanes is one possible treatment. The Department needs to evaluate fully the use of this treatment for I-93 in New Hampshire. The I-93 corridor in New Hampshire is somewhat different from the I-93 corridor in Massachusetts in that the highway section where the shoulder lane treatment was completed in Massachusetts was operating with three travel lanes and the existing shoulders were also generally wider. The I-93 corridor in New Hampshire has only two travel lanes and in areas, the existing shoulders are narrow. The I-93 corridor in NH also has a more rolling terrain and sharper curves, and consequently the use of shoulders may not be a viable treatment.
- Comment. Doug Barker, Selectman: 1) It is important that the Town be provided copies of the plan and charts so that they can be displayed for the Windham citizens. 2) The median is an important asset that defines and helps set NH apart from our neighbors to the south. Eliminating the median or having a train in the median will detract from the appearance of the highway. 3) The Department should consider adding a truck-climbing lane for both the main line northbound and the NB on-ramp at Exit 2. This will greatly improve the congestion by allowing the slower moving vehicles to move over into a slow lane. 4) If wetlands are a problem at Exits 1 and 2 and will take time permitting, then we should start looking at Exits 3 and 4 to keep moving. 5) In an effort to move the project process along, consideration should be given to reconstructing and widening the bridges now.
- Jeff. 1) A copy of the map will be provided. The information on the charts is in the handout. 2) The development of the highway improvements will consider all elements, including aesthetics, and all aspects will be weighed against each other to determine the best alternative. 3) The Department, as mentioned, will be considering a number of interim solutions, (TSM's as they are called), one of which could be a truck climbing lane Northbound out of Exit 2. 4) The project will follow a process to develop an entire corridor solution. The solution for the entire corridor must be developed and approved, before the project can move forward to construction. 5) Early on, the Department tried to accommodate additional widening for those bridges in need of reconstruction or replacement along this section of I-93. This idea was resisted by the resource agencies because it was thought the widening would dictate the location of the future I-93 improvements prior to having a corridor study. As the bridge projects continued, the resource agencies agreed that this may not be such a problem. The Department was able to over-widen some of the structures to accommodate traffic control conditions during construction and have additional width for the future widening of I-93.

Comment. Peter Griffin (NHRRA) - Stated his appreciation that the Department was including rail alternatives in this evaluation. Currently there are initiatives to extend rail service from Newburyport to Maine; Plaistow is considering extending commuter service to the MBTA line. Property values increase if there are multi-modal opportunities like rail nearby. The end of the road building era is approaching.

Comment. It was asked how the wetland mitigation projects fit into the widening of I-93.

Jeff. In an effort to expedite the permitting needs of the project, the Department has been working with the Resource Agencies, and has received approval, to construct two mitigation sites in advance of the I-93 widening. The Department is in the process of going forward with the purchase of properties and the design and construction of two sites, one in Salem (approximately 4 acres of wetland creation and 20 acres of preservation) and one in Londonderry (approximately 15 acres of creation and 60 acres of preservation). Both sites are disturbed gravel pits and together they are expected to be the cornerstone of the Departments wetland mitigation for the widening of I-93. Additional mitigation is also expected to be required along the corridor to address specific, more localized impacts. In Salem, the project may affect Prime wetland areas that have a primary function of providing flood storage. This is critical because of the flooding that occurs in the area. As part of the NH 111 project, the Department is preserving and mitigating wetland impacts at the Pennichuck Water Works property, the Castleton property, and areas near Shadow Lake. If the towns feel they have potential mitigation sites, they need to contact the Department to have these sites evaluated.

Comment. Carol Ritchie: Salem resident at Haigh Avenue. Wetland and floodplain impacts are concerns because of flooding along her street. Noise is also very much a problem today. She asked if residential properties would be acquired for the project.

Jeff. Hydrology and floodplain evaluations will be completed as part of this project. Impacts will be mitigated as appropriate to not exacerbate the problem of flooding. Noise analysis will also be completed for the entire corridor. If noise barriers are cost effective in terms of benefiting enough homes at a reasonable cost per home, then noise barriers will be proposed. Conceptual plans have not been developed, as yet to determine which, if any, property acquisitions will be required.

Comment. 1) What will be the driving force in determining whether three or four lanes are built? 2) How will this relieve traffic on the local roads? 3) Will there be any additional exits?

Jeff. 1) The needs of the highway will govern whether three or four lanes in each direction will be proposed. Four lanes appear to required south of Exit 3. North of Exit 3, traffic volumes are somewhat lower so perhaps three lanes will suffice. Perhaps in this area, the foot print for four lanes will be graded out but only three lanes will be paved. The right of way width should be sufficient to allow four lanes. It is the Department's intent to provide for the highway needs between now and 2020, but also do enough planning so as not to preclude other possible needs the corridor could serve in the future. 2) Improvements to I-93 will draw some traffic that currently uses local roads. Nevertheless, traffic is going to increase in NH with or without improving I-93, and it will be up to the Towns to plan for this traffic and future development. 3) The

Department is not proposing any additional interchanges. Exit 4-A is currently under study by the towns of Derry and Londonderry, and the Department is monitoring the study.

Comment. Bob Sweetser: Watershed impacts and runoff into Cobbetts Pond and Canobie Lake from I-93 are a concern. His group continually tests the water coming into Cobbetts Pond, which happens to flow directly from I-93 via a brook into the Pond. The tests indicate there is a pollution problem. With the widening there will be twice the amount of pavement runoff to treat, and salting will still be more of a problem.

Jeff. The Department will monitor water quality as part of this study. Water quality treatment measures will definitely be included as part of the preliminary and final design. Salt and the potential for pollution from other pollutants will be quantified and reasonably addressed.

Comment. Will HOV lanes be carried into Massachusetts?

Jeff. Whether the Department proposes to build HOV lanes and how they will operate will depend, in part, on what Massachusetts might do. HOV lanes operate well within a given volume of traffic. A recent report prepared in Massachusetts stated that the existing HOV lanes on the north side of Boston might be overtaxed if the lane was extended to the north. To do so may attract too many HOV's. Too many HOV's and the HOV lane does not operate well; too few HOV's and people will demand that the lane be designated as a general use lane. An HOV facility in New Hampshire need not extend to Boston to be functional. It may operate satisfactorily within the borders of New Hampshire or it may extend only part way into Massachusetts. Further evaluation is needed.

Comment. The Department should consider constructing an Exit 3A or 3B and extend a connection from I-93 to NH 111 around Shadow Lake. Then the NH 111 project as currently proposed need not be constructed.

Jeff. The Department looked at this possibility as part of the Windham- Salem NH 111 project. Many local citizens were not happy with the concept. The resource agencies opposed such a route and said it would not be permitted. With respect to Exit 4 A, the study is ongoing and permitting may be difficult.

Comment. Businesses frequently call him regarding what they should do if they own a business in and around the Exit 3 area. Should existing businesses in the Exit 3 area renovate given the likelihood of the interchange being reconstructed?

Jeff. To date the Department has not discouraged people from renovating their business. Until a layout is available, it is difficult to say where the highway improvements may be or how they might affect a particular business. However if a major development is proposed, the Department does have the authority to enter into negotiations to preclude such a development. Much of the property in the median of I-93, north of the development of NH 111-A, will likely be purchased for transportation improvements.